

## Bellwether for black candidates

Deval Patrick, an African-American Democrat, is running well ahead of his opponent, Republican Lt. Governor Kerry Healey at this writing. And as such I have to admit being wrong early on about Deval Patrick's chances to become the first black governor of the state of Massachusetts. The record shows that rarely has someone been elected to the top job in a state without prior electoral experience.



RON  
WALTERS

A clear exception is California, where Arnold Schwarzenegger, an actor is the Governor, but that is in a state where being a movie star have always provided access to political office, as the career of Ronald Reagan would attest. Elsewhere, you not only would be required to have political experience, but to have had the tacit support of the state party, which Patrick didn't.

This causes one to wonder whether the Patrick race is more of a national bellwether that signals a crushing vote for Democrats. For example, in the state of Maryland, Michael Steele, a black Republican, is running for the Senate against Ben Cardin, a 10-term House Democrat. And although Steele is clearly the more charismatic candidate in the race, he is running 11 percent behind Cardin at this writing. The major reason is that the strong opposition of most voters to the war in Iraq has provided a stiff wind against which Michael Steele could be more competitive than under normal circumstances.



Patrick

Massachusetts is somewhat like Maryland in that it is a nominally Democratic state which has elected a Republican governor (several in the case of Massachusetts) but has a Democratic state legislature. Right now, opposition to the war in Iraq is running so strong in Massachusetts that I think it is carrying Patrick along with the tide.

Of course, there are local problems in Massachusetts, such as the quagmire including issues of school integration, the failing economy, problems with the tunnel called "the Big Dig," and other things. The usual Republican fix has been to win election there by calling for a cut in income taxes and being tough on crime. But Patrick has parried with a call for a cut in the property tax and noted that the current Republican administration has cut the police force significantly. The local issues, however, are not the dynamic force deciding this race.

So far, Deval Patrick's opposition to the conduct of the war has enabled his campaign to build a broad-based coalition of supporters at the grassroots, and more recently has begun to solidify his support among Massachusetts legislative leaders and the business establishment in the State. And in the first debate between the candidates, recently held, the charismatic Patrick achieved his campaign objective by not making any mistakes and thereby, giving neither his opponent nor the press much to chew on afterward.

All of this signals a return to a Democratic administration in Massachusetts. Added evidence of this is that the former African American Senator from Massachusetts, Ed Brooke, recently spoke before a Republican party meeting and exhibited his frustration that their not being able to run an effective campaign may result in the loss of the statehouse.

Nevertheless, with this election, blacks could have another political star on the horizon, the second black governor since Doug Wilder of Virginia. And although Wilder briefly toyed with the idea of running for President, one would expect that if Patrick wins, he would become an instant star in the country, but another black star politician, Barack Obama, is blocking his way to the top right now. So, he would probably settle down to politics in the state of Massachusetts and potentially become the next Ed Brooke in time.

In any case, the stars appear to be aligned for whatever reason. An important sign is that while there was considerable doubt that Democrats would take the Senate now as many as 10 seats (all statewide offices) are in play in the most recent polling. Add this to the possibility that parts of the Republican base that is so disaffected by the recent scandal involving indecent communications by former Florida House Republican Mark Foley with some male House pages that may not turn out to vote. It, then, is beginning to look like that, Deval Patrick's charisma aside, the Massachusetts election may be a harbinger of what is to come.

RON WALTERS is director of the African American Leadership Institute, Professor of Government and Politics at the University of Maryland College Park.

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## A life lost, a legacy that burns brightly

Having mournfully put another September 11th anniversary behind us, and as we move closer to October 11, I urge you to stop for a moment on that day and remember the life and death of a brother who was just as significant as each one of those who perished on 9-11. Although he died alone, from an assassin's bullet, although the nation does not pause for a moment of silence, although no bells ring in his memory, although his name is not called from a roll, and although there are no marches held in his name, we must never forget our dear brother, Kenneth H. Bridges.



JAMES  
CLINGMAN

Ken was a family man just like many of those we mourn in the World Trade Center, in the Pentagon, and in Shanksville. Ken was also at work when he was killed. Ken is just as much a hero as those who died trying to help others on 9-11 because he died in the act of helping others. Ken sacrificed his life, before he was killed, by giving so much of his time to the cause of economic empowerment for Black people and taking so much valuable time away from his beloved wife and six adorable children.

On 10-11, at nearly the same time the first tower fell in New York, and after making his last cell phone call to his wife, Ken Bridges lie on the ground dying, a bullet having ripped through his body, thinking the same things I am sure those who died in on 9-11 were thinking just before they transitioned. Knowing him the way I did, I feel confident in saying Ken was thinking about his family, his work, his brothers and sisters, and the quest he had been on since 1997: The MATAH Network.

Ken Bridges was a man among men and we should never forget him and that infamous date, October 11, 2002. Just as we commemorate others who worked and sacrificed for our people and who loved us more than they loved themselves, we must do the same in memory of Ken Bridges. He deserves no less from those for whom he fought so valiantly, so eloquently, and so tirelessly.

Each one of the persons lost on 9-11 left loved ones behind, mourners who still love them and will never forget that tragic day. There can be no less from us for Ken Bridges, who touched thousands of individuals with his engaging smile, his bear-hugs, and his infectious and indefatigable enthusiasm for true economic freedom for Black people. Had he been on one of the upper floors of either of those towers, or on that plane in Shanksville, we would owe him the same homage, not because he happened to be there at the wrong time, but because no matter where he was when he met his demise, we know he would have been working for us.

As Ken's long-time partner and friend, Al Wellington, said in his remembrance of his fallen confidant, "The world doesn't know it yet, but Ken Bridges was the most significant Black leader since Martin Luther King." How right Al was in his assessment. Ken Bridges "died on his way to freedom," never lagging back, afraid to be out front, but as authentic leaders do, he led the way, he showed us how it was done, he lived what he taught. In so doing, Ken found himself in the right place at the wrong time, just as those who lost their lives on 9-11 did. They were where they were supposed to be that day, and so was Ken. He just stopped to get gas, as he was making his way back to his family after a marathon "freedom session" that could have catapulted Black people to new heights in economic freedom.

Ken was in the right place, doing the right thing, for the all the right reasons, but just not at the right time. Those in the World Trade Centers were doing much the same. In both incidents there have been rumors of conspiracy and intentional targeting by someone other than the ones accused and/or convicted of these crimes. Parallels abound between these two occurrences, but the parallels cease when it comes to how we treat the memory of Kenneth Bridges and how we treat the 9-11 tragedy. Yes, there were 2,900 lives lost that day, but to their families each person lost was a single horrendous act just as Ken's death was to his family and friends.

I think about Ken quite often, like nearly everyday, as I see his portrait in my office, his "If I Should Die on My Way to Freedom" poster in my basement, the African doll he gave my daughter, and the MATAH jacket he gave me the first day we met, which I still wear. I remember him as I listen to the tapes and watch the videos on which he speaks so passionately about the importance of Black economic freedom.

I remember him through his wife and children whom I speak to and see from time to time. I remember him through our mutual friends and associates, and I remember Ken Bridges because he actually brought to fruition an institution, an entity through which Black people could circulate our dollars among ourselves. He was an "authentic" leader who paid the ultimate price for his leadership and concern for his people.

It's so nice when my daughter remembers something about Ken and mentions it to me. I am so glad she had the opportunity to meet him. It's good to know that she will never forget 10-11. Will you? Go to [www.kenbridges.org](http://www.kenbridges.org) and get to know him. Rest peacefully, my brother.

JAMES E. CLINGMAN, an adjunct professor at the University of Cincinnati's African American Studies department, is former editor of the Cincinnati Herald newspaper and founder of the Greater Cincinnati African

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## Election losers: What's next?

"But what if I lose?"

This question is on the minds of a number of good North Carolina political candidates who are facing tough elections next month.

Former Georgia Senator Wyche Fowler once gave me the best answer to that question that I have ever heard.

Fowler, as a congressman and senator, almost always faced strong challenges. He finally lost his bid for reelection to the senate in 1992 in a very close runoff.

Long before that loss, I had asked him how he dealt with the possibility that every election brought the possibility of a career-ending defeat.

His answer, as I remember it now, was, "I keep a list of all the things that I want to do, and couldn't do if I won, but would have time and occasion to do if I lost. I'd list the books I wanted to read, the places I could visit, the things I would have time to write about, the friends I could spend time with and so on. There got to be so many good projects on that list, that by the time election day comes, one part of me would be very satisfied if, by losing, I would gain the opportunity to begin to work on my list."

Every candidate ought to consider Fowler's advice, not to diminish or compromise his or her campaign efforts, but to remember that a good life is ahead for election losers as well as winners, if they are willing to embrace it.

If they still have ambition to serve in political office, the losers on November 7 should remember something else. In politics, losing can be a launch pad to later political victory.

Reading H.W. Brands' recent biography of Andrew Jackson reminded me that Jackson's defeat in the presidential contest in 1824 provided the platform for his victory in 1828.

Abraham Lincoln's losing campaign for the U.S. Senate in 1858 paved the way for his election as president in 1860. More recently, Richard Nixon, after losing a presidential election in 1960 and a California governor's election in 1962, came back to win in 1968. Ronald Reagan's losing campaign for the presidential nomination in 1976 was the beginning of his successful effort in 1980.

But North Carolinians do not have to go so far away to find examples of candidates who built victories from earlier defeats. Mike Easley began his statewide election experience with a run-off loss to Harvey Gantt for the Democratic U.S. Senate nomination in 1990. The contacts and a good reputation as an appealing candidate he gained in 1990 helped him win election as North Carolina attorney general in 1992 and 1996 and governor in 2000 and 2004.

Elaine Marshall lost a heartbreaking reelection bid to the North Carolina senate in 1994. She plunged ahead in 1996 to a successful campaign for secretary of state in 1996. Also, after losing a primary contest for U.S. Senate in 2002, she won reelection as Secretary of State in 2004, and has proved herself to be one of the most popular North Carolina political figures since her predecessor, Thad Eure.

There is a long list of other current successful North Carolina political figures who not only put their losses behind them, but made those losses stepping stones to later victories.

Richard Moore lost a bid for the U.S. Congress in 1994, but he developed the experience and the organization to run successfully for state treasurer in 2000.

Robin Hayes, after losing the governor's race in 1996, came back to win election to the Congress in 1998.

Lauch Faircloth lost in the 1984 Democratic gubernatorial primary, but won election to the U.S. Senate in 1994. Elizabeth Dole, after an unsuccessful run for the Republican nomination for president in 2000, won a U.S. Senate seat in 2002.

Whether the losing candidates look for new ventures outside politics or use their defeat as a platform for future successful campaigns, they will find that life can be still be very, very good.

D.G. MARTIN is the host of UNC-TV's North Carolina Bookwatch, which airs Fridays at 9:30 p.m. and Sundays at 5 p.m.

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